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# Wellington House and British Propaganda in an Original Document of 1916

SORIN RADU

## *Wellington House and British Propaganda*

The necessity for British official propaganda in foreign countries was initially recognized as a response to the anti-British activities of other countries. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, it became apparent to the cabinet that a constructive effort was required to counter the detrimental effects of German propaganda upon British interests and prestige, particularly in neutral countries.

There was, however, no precedent nor did there exist any blueprint for such an eventuality; having entered the war completely unprepared for the control and influence of foreign opinion, the government was forced to improvise the necessary machinery hurriedly. The initial plans for the development of the abroad propaganda were made in an atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty. The Foreign Office appeared to be the proper authority for the supervision of any propaganda conducted abroad, and among the first tentative steps was the creation of a small section designed to meet the increased demand for news and information concerning a war fought on foreign soil from the British and other newspaper correspondents in London. This section comprised a nucleus staff of two or three permanent officials and soon came to be known as the News Department of the Foreign Office. It was originally made directly answerable to the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, but was, before the end of 1914, placed under the general supervision of the parliamentary under-secretary of state for Foreign Affairs, at that time Frederick Acland<sup>1</sup>.

In the early months of the war, the work received only reluctant consideration, perhaps because it marked a significant departure from established diplomatic tradition and, as such, was viewed with distaste and suspicion, or possibly because of the short-war illusion. Nevertheless, from an early stage the news department expressed a preference for "information" work, concerning itself more with the dissemination of news abroad and the cultivation of relations with the British and foreign press than with the actual production and distribution of propaganda material such as leaflets and pamphlets. More direct methods of propaganda, involving attacks upon the aims of the enemy and the presentation of the British case, were left to the various non-official patriotic committees and, in particular, with two semi-official propaganda organizations which had meanwhile come into being the Neutral Press Committee and the War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House. Those two organizations were established independently of the Foreign Office arrangements. The Neutral Press Committee was formed under

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<sup>1</sup> Philip M. TAYLOR, "The Foreign Office and British Propaganda during the First World War", *The Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, December the 4<sup>th</sup> 1980, p. 876.

the auspices of the Home Office on 11 September in connexion with the Press Bureau. The committee was placed under the able direction of G.H. Mair, the recently retired assistant editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. His work was essentially concerned with analysis of the neutral press, promotion of the interchange of news between English and foreign newspapers, the promotion of English newspaper sales in neutral countries, the postal distribution of propaganda articles and, before long, the inauguration of a wireless news service<sup>1</sup>.

At the beginning of September 1914, Prime Minister Asquith had invited his close friend Charles Masterman, chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster and chairman of the National Insurance Commission, to take charge of the production and distribution side of work, and Masterman began to establish his literary bureau at Wellington House. Working in strict secrecy under the aegis of the Foreign Office, Wellington House rapidly developed into the most active of all the propaganda departments, arranging for the production and overseas dissemination of books, pamphlets and periodicals as well as photographs, lantern slides and picture postcards. By June 1915 the bureau was producing its own illustrated periodicals printed in foreign languages. Extreme care was taken to disguise the source of all material produced in order to preserve the credibility of the views expressed, a factor which was of particular importance in the most vital neutral country, the United States of America<sup>2</sup>.

The office started its activity on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1914, when Charles Masterman invited 25 authors and publishers, asking them to involve into the identification and application of the best methods of promoting the image and the interests of Great Britain. All participants agreed to keep the secrecy of their work. Therefore, only in 1935 the activity of the War Propaganda Bureau became known to the public. All writers agreed to write pamphlets and books in order to promote the official point of view of the government about the international situation. The Bureau was supported by some publishing and printing houses: Hodder & Stoughton, Methuen, Oxford University Press, John Murray, Macmillan and Thomas Nelson. The next four years, hundreds of writers and artists were asked to create stories, posters, films in order to maintain public's high spirit. The name of Wellington House came from the name of the building in Buckingham Gate where the bureau had its headquarters.

One of the first materials published by Wellington House was *The Bryce Report* (1915), and it referred to the atrocities of the German army made on the Belgian civilians. The next two years Wellington House became the main centre of British propaganda, working very efficiently and into so much secrecy that neither the Parliament knew about its existence. In 1918 the British government decided that Wellington House should become a governmental agency with the name of Department of Information. Charles Masterman continued to coordinate its activity, under the authority of Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Information. The activity of Wellington House was seen as crucial for the victory of Great Britain in World War I<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 876-877.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 877.

<sup>3</sup> See M.L. SANDERS, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War", *The Historical Journal*, vol. 18, 1975, pp. 119-146; Philip M. TAYLOR, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999, p. 35-48.

Into an intermediate report, dated 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1915, Charles Masterman resumed the activity done by that time and described the organization as: "The Bureau established for the purpose of laying before Neutral Nations and the Dominions the case of Great Britain and her Allies" (although the work did in fact include activity in Allied countries as an endeavour to correct misapprehensions which were understood to exist regarding the part that Great Britain was playing in the war). The report indicates that the work was carried on in close cooperation with the Foreign Office and through them with the Diplomatic Missions in the countries dealt with, and with the Home Office Neutral Press Committee which dealt with the dissemination of the news of the day<sup>1</sup>.

### *Objectives of the Study and Documents*

There is no Romanian study about the activity of Wellington House. Our study is based on an original document found in National Historical Central Archives in Bucharest. The document shows the non-official methods of propaganda used by the British government during World War I and it is dated September 1916<sup>2</sup>. It is a very consistent report (112 pages), written by Wellington House and it is addressed to the Foreign Office. The complete title of the document is *Third Report on the Work Conducted for the Government at Wellington House*.

Our study is about the way Wellington House structured its activity, about the means and methods used in building propaganda in the world. In order to show the propagandistic methods Wellington House used, we give four examples: USA, Greece, Italy and Romania. The four states represented important strategic objectives for Great Britain and Entente that time and they were the object of some tough negotiations with the aim to make them involve into the war. The propagandistic activity of Wellington House in the whole world was described in more than 100 pages.

The report describes the propagandistic efforts made by Wellington House in order to create a positive image of British Empire in the world as well as the actions of annihilating the effects of German propaganda in Europe. An important part of the document shows the actions made by Wellington House in neutral countries in order to create a favourable opinion on the interests of Great Britain. The document also shows the wish of that department to convince the American public opinion to join Entente into the war. The document gives important dates about the way propaganda was built into the world, the means and the ways Wellington House, the impact of the propaganda on the allied and neutral countries. The report has 14 chapters and a very consistent introduction: 1. United States; 2. Dissemination; 3. Scandinavia; 4. Holland; 5. Switzerland; 6. Spain, Portugal and Central and South America; 7. Greece and Romania; 8. France; 9. Russia; 10. Italy; 11. Propaganda in Belgian colonies; 12. Propaganda in Oriental and Muslim World; 13. Propaganda in images; 14. Propaganda in films<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Wellington\\_House](http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Wellington_House) (December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale București, fond Microfilme Belgia, Reel 34, negatives 180-244.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 180, 181.

The report tells about the activity done by Wellington House in the first half of the year 1916. As we said in the introduction, the number of the activities done there considerably increased during that time

"and many developments have taken place; partly designed to counteract the new moves to the German propaganda organisation, partly in compliance with requests for special work from Government departments, especially the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the India Office, and partly owing to the inevitable increase of organisation which has been necessary in order to cope with the world-wide demand for information concerning the British and Allied activities during the war"<sup>1</sup>.

They said into that report that the propaganda, consisting in giving correct and daily informations to the newspapers of the whole world, was a task for the Department of Information of Foreign Affairs and not for Wellington House.

### *The Wellington House Team*

The propagandistic activity of Wellington House was sustained by many important British writers. Some of those writers that worked for Wellington House as they wished or being asked to work, gave their permission that their works to be used for propaganda were: lord Bryce, lord Cromer, lord Revelstoke, Gilbert Murray, H.A.L. Fisher, Ernest Baker, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Hume Williams, J.H. Morgan, Archibald Hurd, William Archer, J.M. Robertson, Ford Madox, Sir Henry Newbolt, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, John Buchan, Alfred Noyes, Rudyard Kipling, G.M. Trevelyan, H.W. Massingham, G.W. Prothero, Donald, Baemaekers, E.F. Davies, A.G. Gardiner, John Masfield, St. Loe Strachey<sup>2</sup>.

The *Third Report on the Work Conducted for the Government at Wellington House* was written by a large team of British officials, functionaries of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, professors at some important universities, writers, publishers and reporters, directed by the chief of the department Charles F.G. Masterman: Gilbert Parker, A.J. Toynbee, Edwyn Bevan, H. Francis (University of Oxford), W. Macneile Dixon (University of Glasgow), A.W.G. Randall, J.S. Willmore, G. Elliot Dodda, T.A. Welsh, Anthony Hope Hawkins<sup>3</sup>. To this list we can add French, Italian, Belgian or American writers, but their names don't appear into the report written by Wellington House.

As for the team at Wellington House, Charles Masterman underlined the idea of increasing the number of the team members because there was more work to be done. He also expressed his gratitude to some governmental departments for the big support in the last two years: Department of Information of Foreign Affairs, Department of Information of Amirality and War Bureau, Press Bureau of Censorship, Colony Bureau and Bureau for India. "Much of our work has been done at the direct of these departments" – Masterman said.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 184.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 180, 181.

"The country is also indebted to those British residents and British sympathisers who, in almost every country in the world, have so readily undertaken some part in the work of enlightening neutral and Allied countries as to the justice and greatness of our cause"<sup>1</sup>.

### *Methods of Propaganda at Wellington House*

The methods of propaganda used by that department which completed those about daily informations were: writing, translation and distribution of books, pamphlets, publications of the government, speeches about the war, its origin and history and all problems related to war; production and distribution of special illustrated materials; supervizing the way articles and interviews published into world newspapers and magazines influenced public opinion, especially the American one; distribution on a wide range of illustrated materials, pictures, posters, images and photos in and newspapers and magazines, and also exhibitions; production and distribution of films; support for neutral press correspondents, particularly the American ones, in order to give more informations; personal correspondence with important people abroad, especially with American ones; change of visits and personal trips in neutral or allied countries, as well as visits of some important people in neutral or allied countries into Great Britain; production and distribution of maps, diagrams, posters, lantern slides, courses, picture postcards and all possible means related to different ways of propaganda<sup>2</sup>.

Propagandistic non-official actions of Wellington House were supported unofficially by the British ambassadors and members of diplomacy. The report mentioned that an important progress was done in 1916:

„As part of this policy of devolution, we have arranged that a considerable amount of our publication is actually done in the neutral and allied countries themselves. Wellington House publications (in addition to the supply from London) are now printed and published by native publishers in Paris, Madrid, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Russia. Many of the countries, especially the smaller neutrals which border on Germany, are extremely sensitive to anything like organised allied propaganda stimulated by foreign Governments and in some of them, especially Sweden and Switzerland, our foreign Governments were forbidden by the censorship or have encountered grave difficulty with the Customer. It has, therefore, proved exceedingly useful to be able to obtain publications, both for sale and free distribution, of our literature in these countries by local publishers in a form which bears no evidence at all of any connections with British Government propaganda“.

Among the special spokesmen who worked in countries visited by British propaganda, Wellington House recruited a large number of British or foreign collaborators

"who have with great energy, patriotism, and goodwill very materially assisted in the work of distributing literature among those where they consider it would

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 182.

be most useful, and also in the work of suggesting the kind of literature that is most appropriate to the various countries with which they are concerned"<sup>1</sup>.

Charles Masterman, chief at Wellington House, said that in the two years of activity there was done an important progress in world distribution of literature and pictorial materials of propaganda, which arrived even into furthest parts of the world. On a wide range, the development of British propaganda was due to the direct implication of British residents or pro-allied in many parts of the world and its main aim was to counteract the German propaganda. Masterman said that a big progress was done in South America and Middle Orient:

„In both these regions the German propagandism has been very carefully organised, not only as it appears to influence opinion in war time, but also with a view to trade interests when the war is over, when it is hoped that the prestige of Germany may be maintained in the subsequent commercial competition. In South America especially, [...] in very great city the friends of the Germans and the friends of the Allies have organised themselves into propaganda committees; and a daily battle occurs to convince the local populations as to the justice or success of the one cause or the other. As will be seen from the reports, the friends of the Allies are confident that they are obtaining the upper hand in this war of opinion. As a Vice-Consul in Brasil reports: 'I think the distribution of pamphlets and newspapers is nothing short of wonderful. The Germans have been entirely driven from the field'"<sup>2</sup>.

Propaganda activity by photos, newspapers written in different languages and cinemas developed considerably that time. Wellington House sent over 4000 photos a week to newspapers in the whole world and published over one million pictorial materials every month. "These have not only broken the previous German monopoly in war pictures but show a very conspicuous dominance of pictorial matter favourable to the Allies" – the document says. Along with that pictorial propaganda, they made photo exhibitions, films in very many neutral or allied countries, showing all the efforts Great Britain made in war. Since its setting up to September 1916, Wellington House published and distributed newspapers and pictorial magazines in countries of Europe, America, Asia and Africa in order to create a positive image of the political and military actions of the British Empire. Examples of that kind of publications were: *The War Pictorial* – which appeared monthly in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Greek, Danish, Swedish, Dutch and German; *Al Hakikat (The Truth)* – bimonthly, Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Hindi; *Cheng Pao (The Faithful Record)* – bimonthly, Chinese; an edition of *Cheng Pao* in Japanese with the title *Seng-ji Gaho*; *America-Latina* – first appeared monthly alternatively in Paris and London and later, bimonthly, in Spanish, and it was sent to Spain, Central America and all Spanish world; *O Espelho* – appeared monthly in Portuguese for Portugal, Brasil and Portuguese speaking world; *Hesperia* – published weekly for Greece and Greek speaking world. Wellington House edited and distributed over one million pictorial publications every month<sup>3</sup>.

Wellington House made a consistent and penetrating propaganda by cinemas, too. For example, *Britain Prepared*, a film created with the aim to show the activity

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the Marine and the Army, was casted in every country that had film equipment. There were other war films, as those about the fight on Somme. Charles Masterman gave some examples of the big success of British films about the positive military actions of the British Army. A favourable image of the British Army in Russian Empire was offered by showing the films to the armies of General Brussiloff (as the czar asked), "immediately before the great advance – sometimes under fire, always within sound of the guns – forms a kind of epic of cinema display". The Wellington House representative in Russia, captain Bromhead, showed the films about the British Army and its successes to the Northern Russian Armies, to Generals Russki, Radko Dimitrieff and Staffs, in the presence of many army bodies.

"Again the open-air shows were most successful and several times given under most interesting circumstances: one within 2 versts of Uxhill Bridgehead, another close to Darlen Island on the Dvinn, a third in an old building at Kemmern, full of shell holes of which one was made during the afternoon preceding the show"<sup>1</sup>.

About the activity of distribution, the report said that there were produced and distributed over 300 books and pamphlets by that time. It is important to say that *Bryce Report* (80 pp.), with its Appendix (over 300 pp.) about the German atrocities was edited in 11 foreign languages. The literature of propaganda was, therefore, distributed in 21 languages. That literature consisted in: 1. official governmental publications (translated in many languages), especially of the British, French and Belgian governments; 2. literature written at Wellington House; 3. literature written at the request of Wellington House; 4. literature written independently either in Great Britain, or abroad, and which was meant to be distributed in neutral and allied countries. Propagandistic literature circulated with the help of the embassies, legations and consulates; with the help of big ship companies from all over the world; with the help of some big distribution companies: Society of Religious Hymns, Society for Bible circulation, insurance companies; with the help of some organizations as "Over-Seas Club" (whose members were spread in the whole world), Reign Colonial Institute and Victoria League; big British corporations and firms, as British-American and Ardath Tobacco Companies; local committees of British subjects abroad, organized in order to spread the truth about Allies; pro-allies committees; people that voluntarily accepted to do the distribution work. The key of that huge propaganda was the open and generous help that big commercial and naval companies offered to Wellington House. "Their active and ready cooperation has alone made possible such success in this work as has been obtained."<sup>2</sup> As for the distribution method, the report said that Wellington House tried to avoid that promiscuous strategy, inspired by the government and consisting in a suffocating literature about the German methods and which produced only indignation and disgust to those who were sometimes forced to read it. Practically

"all our literature bears the mark of some printer or publisher, and there is nothing to trace it to any Government origin. It is being sent as far as possible through personal channels by those who know the right people in the various countries to whom it should be distributed; and we attach great value to

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 182-183.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 183.



this method of personal contact and recommendation. It is being sent especially to certain classes; members of Parliament; newspapers, central and provincial; priests and clergymen of all denominations; professional men; leaders of public opinion and those who have most influence on their surroundings as well as to universities and colleges, libraries and reading rooms, hotels, ships' libraries, doctors' waiting rooms, barbers' shops, casinos and any places where man may collect in numbers for reading or discussion. By this means pro-Ally literature now reaches the most remote corners of the world and we hear of its influence not only on the settled countries, but in such regions as the Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, the Chatham Islands, Sandwich Islands, New Guinea, Iceland, New Hebrides, Formosa, the Belgian Congo, Fernando Po. We have had applications from people in Barcelona to send to friends in Scandinavia from South America for literature in Arabic, from port officials on the coast of China for literature in Danish. Many of our pamphlets have been reproduced in newspapers in regions so diverse as Bogota, Switzerland, Teheran, Johannesburg, Patagonia"<sup>1</sup>.

In a lot of countries the newspapers wrote considerable reviews on publications of Wellington House. Most part of the propagandistic literature was distributed in such a way in the world as nobody could make any connection of it with the British government or with Wellington House. The letters sent by those who distributed it showed that the propagandistic literature arrived to the furthest places:

"A Chinaman in Guatemala writes that he was one of the last Germanophiles in that country, but has been converted to the Allied cause by the literature he has received. A Dutchman in Holland tells that a pamphlet which has been lent to him has been passed into the hands of the fifteenth reader, and is still doing work. A small storekeeper in Amsterdam awards some of our books as prizes to customers who buy goods at his shop. Our literature on show at a store in Maine has resulted in several fights in the stores between the sympathisers of the Allies and the German Powers. In the Argentine a former Turkish consul is distributing copies of *Al Hakikat* to the Moslem population there. In Norway, our books, it is reported, have percolated into the innermost recesses of remote fjords, where those who have received them hand them to their neighbours, and the editors of provincial papers apply for special war literature. In Chile the wife of a former president, after seeing the picture of the ruined churches of Belgium and France, announces that she prays night and morning for the success of the Allies. In Italy a sympathiser reports that he reads in the evening to groups of peasants, which often become quite a crowd, from the *Horrors of Wittenberg*, or the account of the battle of Jutland. A well known business man in Calcutta describes *Al Hakikat* as 'a great imperial educator'. At Saffi, in Morocco, we have carried the truth to natives who were under the impression that London no longer existed. At Rio Grande copies of *O Espelho* are placed on sale on the pavements, with the result that 'passers-by stop to look it over, and those who buy it read it'. At Santa Fe, in the Argentine, it is reported that the result of the propaganda is such that many neutral firms are refusing to have Germans in their employ. In Nicaragua, as a result of our activities, we are informed that 'the great majority of the Nicaraguans and negroes are pro-Ally'. In the hinterland of Nigeria our illustrated papers are posted on the hoardings of the shafts of the gold

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

mines. Even in Germany the *Weiser Zeitung* thought it is necessary to review Mr. Toynbee's pamphlet on the death of Edith Cavell, and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* devoted a long article to our pamphlet *Holland and Germany*, [...] Intercepted letters from South America urge renewed German efforts, one complaining that German propaganda in South America has been seriously neglected, 'particular in contrast to the energetic campaign of England, which has deluged South America with literature in excellent Spanish'<sup>1</sup>.

In a high range, Wellington House tried to supply the type of propagandistic literature that the local community required. The literature thus varied, from the point of its weight and character, from pamphlets about a new special situation like the censorship or the Black List in USA, to books with hundreds of pages on the responsibility and carrying out of operations of the war. Among those publications to which there was most demand in 1916 and distributed by Wellington House we mention: *Neutral Nations and the War* of lord Bryce (in eleven languages), *Edith Cavell's Death* (eight languages), *Horrors of Wittenberg* (nine languages), *Murder of a Nation* signed by Toynbee (eight languages), *Sure Shield and Murder at Sea* by Hurd (ten languages), the reply of William Archer to professor Brades, *Murder of Captain Fryatt*, *The German and British Finance* by Davies (nine languages). The books on the opinions of neutral countries were special values. Such books are James Beck's *Double Alliance vs. Triple Entente* (ten languages), professor Church's *Reply to German Appeal* (ten languages), professor Munroe Smith's *Weight of the Imponderables* (seven languages), Owen Wister's *Pentecost of Calamity* (six languages) and Baemaekers' drawings (fourteen languages). Amongst larger volumes prepared for Wellington House are: *England's Effort* by Humphry Ward (230 pp.), *Ciò che hanno fatto gli Inglesi* by Destrée (300 pp.), *Belgium and Germany* by Davignon (200 pp.) and *Neutral and Loyal Belgium* by Maxweiler (350 pp.)<sup>2</sup>.

Wellington House had a lot of activities which were impossible to classify on a certain name. Those activities varied from planning the trips of the representatives of the French working class in big cities of France, including large public meetings, and in cities of Great Britain, to the supply of posters in China and films with images from Italy in London and the British ones abroad. "Some of the work, again is of such a confidential nature as could not be set out in a printed report"<sup>3</sup>.

### *Germany and the Activity of Wellington House*

The German government was aware of the existence of English propaganda, but had no definite information about its methods and centre. In particular, the existence of Wellington House seemed unknown to it. Generally, the report written by Charles Masterman in September 1916 shows that in spite of the prohibitions and censorship imposed by the German government, the publications of Wellington House could be found in Germany, too. In an article published in *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel*, Philippe Rath mentioned about 50 publications of Wellington House, which he discovered in other languages, especially of the countries around Germany:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 183-184.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

"If, besides newspapers, – he remarks – pamphlets and brochures are used in order to spread abroad the English official view of the war, that is, no doubt, due to the consideration that everything in book form, if it is read at all, is read more thoroughly and with more attention than an article, is retained longer in the memory, and perhaps even escapes the waste-paper basket for a considerable time, producing thereby more permanent effect [...] These are translated into the languages of the neutral countries, and plentifully distributed in those countries [...] That the English Government uses against us for purposes of propaganda and plentifully distributes its parliamentary publications especially the command papers, is known to everyone [...] Books and pamphlets which were originally published without any special commission from the propaganda associations are often subsequently taken over by these, and then adapted to foreign consumption in translations [...] If we had nothing to set against the vast organisation of English influence except the material named in a book which has been published by England as 'German propaganda', our situation would be gloomy indeed. Certainly we have no special aptitude for work of this kind: against such 'diplomacy' it is only 'military strategy' which is any good"<sup>1</sup>.

Another opinion on the activity and ways of British propaganda is that of Dr. Bischoff, in an article published in *Deutsche Revue* in the autumn of 1916:

"The campaign had started on a gigantic scale – he asserts – right from the outbreak of the war [...] Special bureaux for propaganda purposes were established in Paris and London, in addition to the existing telegraph and news agencies which for years past had carried on a 'war of calumny' against the Central Powers with great skill and without scruples. Their task was to centralize the now overflowing tide of fighting literature, to organise the often independently working forces, to provide the material for the influencing and poisoning of public opinion in the various neutral countries, to publish the 'prepared material' to have the various articles translated into every language of Europe, and to provide for the spreading copiously and cautiously of the results of this labour [...] It may be said that there is no domain of modern life and history in any way related to the war that has been neglected"<sup>2</sup>.

The German analyst said that British propaganda preferred pictorial materials and short pamphlets which, translated in other languages were meant to show the fight of England for the liberty of small countries. They used statements as: "the peace of the world threatened by 'Prussian Militarism' or "the long prepared readiness for war of Germany". Dr. Bischoff concluded that the British Propaganda Bureau remained less known to the public and fulfilled its activity with the help of English or neutral publishing houses.

"These firms it is true, have spared no means of advertisement nor expense in order to flood the whole world with the products of the English propaganda literature. From the practices used, [...] it will be seen that the chiefs of the English propaganda do business on a grandiose scale, and that they have ample means at their disposal"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 184-185.

### *Wellington House Propaganda in USA*

The propaganda activity that was organized by Wellington House in United States occupied a special and peculiar position from the very beginning. The community of language, the large number of connections between the two countries and the efficient apparatus of distributing the informations and opinions through a distinguished body of American journalists representing the newspapers and syndicates permanently planted in London, opened channels of communication which were not present in many other neutral countries.

"On the other hand, – Charles Masterman wrote in his report – the noise and insolence of the pro-German Dernburg propagandism in the United States at the beginning of the war and the well-meaning but unwise efforts of an authority amateur British lecturers and writers in America, were found to be causing an intense exasperation and jealousy of any Government organised attempts to influence public opinion one way or another"<sup>1</sup>.

That was why, when Sir Gilbert Parker took charge of the American Department two years ago, considered that the situation was somewhat delicate, with necessity for great caution in any official actions. His activity included: carrying on with an immense personal correspondence with a large number of public men scattered through the United States on the various war questions as they arrived; the careful distribution of books (apparently from non-official sources), pamphlets and official documents, in a list of considerable bulk; the provision (in connection with the News Department of Foreign Affairs) of new facilities for American correspondents and special writers that came from America from time to time to investigate the conditions in England and the evolution of the war, as well as the large number of interviews with prominent persons in Great Britain for the American newspapers; the placing of articles written by writers which were well known in American newspapers and magazines and assistance given to other writers who themselves were asked for articles and who desired intimate knowledge on some particular points at issue; arrangements of selected visits of some famous Americans, the entertainment and the provision for them of facilities of seeing what they desired and meeting whom they wished and the arrangement, on the other hand, of some visits in America of some Englishmen well-known in America by which they could exercise their influence quietly to the best advantage; besides a great amount of miscellaneous work which cannot be specially classified in dealing with the press, in newspapers and public, generally of America.

"By all such means and without any appearance of government propaganda, a very considerable amount of work has been done in assisting the people of America to form right judgement as to the causes of the war, the nation of incidents and frictions which have arisen from time to time, and the efforts being made by this country towards a successful conclusion"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

### *Propaganda of Wellington House in Greece*

The report on organizing and developing the propaganda was written by J.S. Willmore. The propagandistic action of Wellington House in Greece was very penetrating, and that was due to the fact that Germany managed to get the sympathy of an important part of press. German propaganda in Greece was coordinated by Baron Schenk, the representative of Krupp Factories and "there can be no doubt – Willmore wrote in his report – that he carries on his duties with untiring energy and no little success". Previously to his arrival, only one of the great newspapers in Athens, *Nea Himera*, expressed pro-German tendencies, the proprietor of it having been educated in Germany. *Embros* recommended itself as being independent, although, maybe for personal reasons, it was strongly anti-Venizelist. The remainders of the daily press, about fourteen newspapers, were pro-Ally. The report of Willmore established the worrying fact that:

"At the present moment only seven newspapers – the *Patris*, *Hestia*, *Ethnos*, *Nea Hellas*, *Astir*, *Ethniki* and M. Venezelos's organ, the *Kiryx* –, still espouse the cause of Allies. The remainders have succumbed to the temptation to put in their way by Baron Schenk and his staff; and they succumbed all the more readily because their owners were in a condition bordering on poverty. No one in Athens is ignorant that they were bought by German gold. The *Akropolis* is a good instance in point; the proprietor of this newspaper had, all his life, evinced the strongest sympathy for England, paying constant visits to this country. He was a blind admirer of everything English; but latterly, haven falling into debt and being unable even to pay his workmen, he had not the courage to resist the advances which Baron Schenk made to him, on hearing of his circumstances. If any one whom the baron approached entertained any scruple, it was represented to him that true patriotism lay in espousing the German cause and not that of the Allies, since Germans must inevitably win the victory, and those who opposed them would meet with severe retribution when all was over. In some cases the papers have been bought outright, in others so much is paid per line. From two to five francs is paid for the insertion of the German *communiqué*; from two to five thousand francs have been paid for important leading articles. It is alleged that three million marks have been spent on the newspapers in one year"<sup>1</sup>.

The opinion of Wellington House was that the pro-German articles which were written on command were not representative for the public opinion:

"The vast majority of the population still looks to the Entente Powers as their natural friends and protectors. They have not forgotten what they owe to England, and the name of Byron and Gladstone are still familiar in every household, while their civilization is practically an adaptation of French methods [...] Every Greek with any pretence to education speaks French and reads French literature and if acquires a second foreign language, it is English or Italian rather than German"<sup>2</sup>.

The only supporters of the German cause, before Baron Schenk's propagandistic activity, were those closest to the King, or those who were looking for King's

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 214.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

favour, as well army superior officers which were, most of them, trained in Germany and thought that German army was invincible.

Wellington House had to annihilate the German propaganda done by Baron Schenk in Greece, who not only financed some of the newspapers, but also distributed a large number of pamphlets in the whole country. The most important of them was a brochure of eighty pages with the title *English Policy and Hellenism*, in which the attitude of England in Greece during the last century was presented in a very hostile way. The author tried to prove that England, even when it acted in the interest of Greece, was in fact moved by selfish considerations. Even more, Baron Schenk had in Athens:

"Hundreds of Germans and Greeks in his pay, whose duty it is to engage people in conversation at the cafés and other public places, and by promises and misrepresentations, to obtain adherents to the German views. Many of these are in the Greek Secret Police"<sup>1</sup>.

The attempts which were made to counteract the German influence during the first year of the war were reduced to the translation and distribution of books and pamphlets, including ministers' speeches and *Bryce' Report* on the German atrocities. They were translated in English with the support of Anglo-Hellenic Society. Later it was decided, at the suggestion of Atchley from the British Legation in Athens, to issue the translations in Greece itself. Therefore, there were published or were on the point of being published the following books and pamphlets: *Beck's Double Alliance vs. Triple Alliance* and *Case of Belgium*, *Prince's American Viewpoint*, *Fisher's British Share in the War*, the Prime-Minister's speech *How do we Stand To-Day*, the report on Wittenberg camp and a summary of *J'accuse*, from which they published five to six thousand copies were printed. Six thousand of Beck's pamphlets were distributed until March 1915, and since then nine thousand were printed. Eight thousand copies of *Wittenberg Report* were printed as well<sup>2</sup>.

Another method of propaganda that Wellington House used successfully was the publication of some newspapers in Greek in London and their distribution in Greece. That was the illustrated weekly newspaper *Hesperia*, which contained images of the achievements and resources of the Allies, as well as leading articles on the justice of Ally cause in forcible and carefully chosen language:

"The writers are careful to avoid any semblance of exaggeration, their object being to refute, by facts and plain arguments, the false statements made in the pro-German press and to hold up to ridicule the extravagant notions concerning German *Kultur* and invincibility"<sup>3</sup>.

But the columns of *Hesperia* were not filled only with political and military news; there were articles on different subjects – science, literature, music and theatre. "This insertion of matter of general interest causes the paper to be more generally read than would be the case if it were confined to war topics." The newspaper was sent gratis by post to the main residents in Athens, including ministers and members of Parliament, judges, lawyers, school managers, Government officials,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 214-215.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 215.

clergy and leading merchants. In all, nearly sixteen thousand copies were distributed in Greece and Greek colonies<sup>1</sup>.

J.S. Willmore's report on the propagandistic activity of Wellington House in Greece concluded that they had made a lot in order to counteract the influence of German propaganda, but there was a lot more to be done until Greece would abandon neutrality and join the Ally cause<sup>2</sup>.

### *Propaganda of Wellington House in Italy*

The report on the activity of Wellington House in Italy was written by W.G. Randall. The propagandistic activity of Wellington House in Italy was directed by a certain C.A. Mills of Rome, who worked directly under the control of the British ambassador. Mills was supported substantially by the marchioness Bettina Della Valle di Casanova. She directed the British propaganda in the North of Italy.

Propaganda materials were initially published in England and distributed by well trained people in 13 important cities of Italy: Genoa, Turin, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Pisa, Florence, Perugia, Ancona, Rome, Naples, Taranto and Palermo. The following statements in the report are very interesting:

"Instructions were duly given to distribute only by means of personal acquaintances from hand to hand, and to avoid indiscriminate distribution. This principle has been followed out to the present day. It was soon discovered that it was advisable to print and distribute local articles and other works. So in addition to the matter sent out from England, a great deal of other work was printed locally and circulated amongst the people"<sup>3</sup>.

The report makes statements on the Italians' perception of the propaganda activity:

"At first, I found that it was very coldly received. I think this was due to the fact that they had been deluged with a mass of vituperative literature from Berlin. It is really amusing, on looking back at what happened, to think how useless all this expenditure of German money has been. It is estimated that this propaganda must have cost Germany at least ten millions of francs and it is generally believed that Prince von Bülow brought with him a credit order of 200.000 l. sterling. Whether this is true or whether it is not, the main fact remains that every hotel in the large cities, every business person who had ever had commercial connection with any German firm, every parish priest, every proprietor of a café or a barber's shop, down to the smallest villages throughout Italy received regularly either a copy of a subsidized newspaper or other literature which was proportionate to the importance of the recipient"<sup>4</sup>.

Mills insisted on the fact that a very visible and piercing German propaganda aroused negative reactions in the Italian society. Therefore, Wellington House concentrated on the distribution of good literature, avoiding any dispute or invective.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 216.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 222.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

The distributions were pamphlets from England, written by English writers, but soon it became obvious that they should be translated in Italian and important articles written by Italians should be published. That had a deeply satisfying effect:

"We have often been deluged with applications for particular work, and have had to reprint as many as two or three editions of certain pamphlets which have struck the popular mind and appreciation".

In the second stage, they stressed on the publication of propagandistic materials in Italy, and the report gives long lists of the published titles, including their circulation. The document does not mention anything about the costs, it only says that the invoices with the original bills were sent directly either to Wellington House or to the Embassy.

The report says that they sent propaganda materials to all political parties:

"We send to Clericals (especially the Vatican), the Nationalists, who correspond to our Conservatives, Liberals, Radicals, Republicans and Socialists. Probably the most useful agencies we have are the Popular Libraries of Italy. There are some 1.500 in number, and every library has one copy of every pamphlet which has been issued, the more important libraries have two copies. By this means we get at millions of readers of the poorer classes, and I know from personal observation that this literature is widely read and appreciated for the simple reason that nearly every Italian is a born politician"<sup>1</sup>.

It is written in the report that until July 1916 they distributed propagandistic materials favourable to Great Britain, being in all 856 200 pamphlets published in Italy, and 100 000 received from Wellington House, meaning a total distribution of one million pamphlets and books. The report mentioned also the use of other means of propaganda too: photo displays in shop windows, particularly in big cities as Rome, Milan, Turin and Bologna; the organizing of some lectures on the war of some personalities who were pro-Great Britain.

British propaganda materials got into most libraries in Italy, but also in the workers' organizations, as "Società Lavoratori del Libro", "Cooperativa Induno", "Società di Mutuo Soccorso Figli del Lavoro", "Associazione Inquilini", "Biblioteca Mutuo Soccorso Monbello". From the report results also the positive feed-back of propaganda, as the letters of different Italian public personalities or even workers addressed to Bettina Della Valle di Casanova and to the British Embassy showed. They were convinced on the right cause of the Allies and the implication of Italy:

"It is impossible to give any just idea of the help and encouragement given me on all sides. Senators, deputies, professors, officers, workmen, all have assisted where they could, and all alike have expressed the opinion that valuable work has been done, much misunderstanding of England's policy and attitude removed, and Germany's methods made clear"<sup>2</sup>.

The conclusion of Alec W.G. Randall on the propaganda of Wellington House in Italy was that:

"Italians generally have long been thoroughly convinced as to the rights and wrongs of the war; all our more recent efforts have been directed towards

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 223.



the double object of explaining Great Britain's share in the war and showing the Italians that their own difficulties, aims and achievements are appreciated in this country. The general effect of British propaganda in Italy is fairly summed up in a recent letter from the Ambassador: 'I believe that the work which has been done quietly through the popular libraries has been of great importance in moulding and maintaining good views among the people...'. The calmness with which the Italian people took the Austrian offensive in the Trentino, the smoothness, with which the change of Government was effected, the gradual falling off in querulousness in the tone of the *Idea Nazionale* and other extremist newspapers, and, finally, the enthusiasm with which the declaration of war against Germany has been welcomed all these things show that the work which has been done in Italy has not failed to bear fruit"<sup>1</sup>.

### *Wellington House Propaganda in Romania*

The report on the organizing and developing of Wellington House Propaganda in Romania was written by the same person as that in Greece, J.S. Willmore. He wrote that the German element in Romania was limited to the German residents, in a number of 70 000-71 000, 240 000 Jews, most of them being German speakers, and a certain number of high-educated people, some of them being members of the Parliament. The majority of the population, including the army, sympathized with the cause of the Allies, in spite of the strenuous efforts of the German agents to influence it in the interest of the Central Powers. The newspapers, though, were "convinced" to plead for the German cause. J.S. Willmore quoted the rumour that the proprietor of one of the great newspapers in Bucharest, was offered one million francs for publishing nothing else but pro-German articles. He refused the offer, but he accepted 600 000 francs for ceasing the publication of the newspaper. Pamphlets were distributed everywhere and a campaign of false informations was carried on with unabated zeal. He also quoted the information that the agents of German government paid 70 000 francs in custom duties on pamphlets published in Germany for distribution in Romania<sup>2</sup>.

The feeling in the country at the end of 1915 was described as follows:

"Since the last two months there has been a considerable reversion of public opinion in favor of M. Bratianu's neutrality policy. This change has been brought about mostly by the Austro-German invasion of Serbia, a fear of sharing the terrible fate of Belgium and Serbia bringing adherents to the wise policy of the Prime Minister. The sympathies of many majorities of persons, who move in Government circles, are with France, whom they wish to see victorious. Many of these temper these sentiments with admiration for Germany's strength and power of resistance; many of them detest Russia, and have no confidence in her army. However, Romania desires to bring about a national union. On the whole, the majority of the people consider that M. Bratianu has done well to wait; for the war will last a long time, and a small nation has not the strength and means of resistance which the great Powers

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 224.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 217.

possess. There is, however, a conviction on the side of the Quadruple Entente, but not until the latter is able to oppose 800.000 troops of Austro-Germans, Turks and Hungarians, with any army of equal if not superior strength"<sup>1</sup>.

Until the end of 1915 – the reporter mentioned – Wellington House published and distributed in the country diplomatic correspondence, some pamphlets and minister speeches, Bryce's *Report on German Atrocities* and 10 000 copies of David Mitrany's *A Right Cause* and Beck's *Judgement*, all in Romanian language. The same year an edition of Raemaekers' *Cartoons* was published with the legends in Romanian language and a translation on the *Wittenberg Camp* was on course to be published. Films as *Britain Prepared* were exhibited in Bucharest and had great success. Therefore, Wellington House prepared to send new war films to Bucharest. A large number of English pamphlets, amongst which war stories for children, were distributed in the country.

J.S. Willmore, the author of the report, concluded that

"the distribution of our pamphlets and efforts of friends on the spot are, no doubt, exerting good influence and counteracting in some measure the German propaganda; but it must be remembered that Germany does not content herself with the distribution of pamphlets. She has long since obtained a strong position in Romania, as elsewhere, by her methods of 'peaceful penetration' and she strengthens this position by threats and promises, continually holding up to the population the spectres of Belgium and Serbia"<sup>2</sup>.

## Conclusion

Wellington House was the secret department of British propaganda during World War I, which had the mission to create a positive image of the British Empire in the world and also to counteract the propagandistic actions of Central Powers, particularly the German ones. The importance of the propaganda for the British government results from an article published in Paris newspaper *Le Figaro*:

"The English are past masters in matters of publicity. They know the value of opinion. They appeal to it by insistent repetition till they produce a kind of hypnotic effect, and that is just what was wanted to reply to the German publicity which has been at work on us too long. The English do not haggle over the cost of official announcements, or of a telegram, for they know that it is money well spent"<sup>3</sup>.

By founding Wellington House, Charles Masterman managed to create a very efficient body of propaganda. The way propaganda was structured, its very multiple means, the competition with German propaganda, the generous finance offered by the British government shows the importance of that activity for the foreign affairs of the British Empire. The pages about United States, Greece, Italy

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 183.

and Romania demonstrate the fact that Great Britain used very piercing official and non-official means of propaganda with a double aim: to annihilate the German influence on one hand, and to create a favourable stream of public opinion favourable for joining Entente at war. We must stress the fact that the propagandistic effort was more consistent in the case of Greece and Italy, comparing to Romania; this shows the importance of the two countries for the diplomacy of Great Britain in the years 1914-1916.